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CABLE NEWS NETWORK (CNN)

INTERVIEW WITH:
WILLIAM PERRY, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1994

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WOLF BLITZER (Senior White House Correspondent): Joining us now is Defense Secretary William Perry, who himself attended this extraordinary meeting in the East Room of the White House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, for spending some time with us on CNN. The latest situation right now -- is there any hope at all that the three coups leaders in Haiti will voluntarily step down. Do you sense there's any division among the three of them?

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SEC. PERRY: We haven't seen any definite indication that they're going to step down, Wolf. We continue to hope. There is still time for them to step down, but we have not seen that evidence. We're still hoping in order to avoid the casualties that would inevitably occur if we have to go in.

MR. BLITZER: How much time is left, in your opinion, for them to step down?

SEC. PERRY: I cannot give you a specific time schedule, but it's very soon now.

MR. BLITZER: Within a matter of a day or a two or three?

SEC. PERRY: Yes.

MR. BLITZER: And is there any last-ditch diplomatic initiative, intermediaries, an envoy that could convey this message directly to the Lieutenant General Cedras and his allies?

SEC. PERRY: We continue to have discussions with Cedras and his envoys. We continue to hope.

MR. BLITZER: When you say the United States continues to have discussions, in what format are those discussions taking place?

SEC. PERRY: I'm not free to say, Wolf, but we are having discussions.

MR. BLITZER: So there is an intermediary, a diplomatic back channel, that's sort of going between Washington and Port-au-Prince conveying these messages?

SEC. PERRY: We have discussions underway.

MR. BLITZER: What can you tell us about the prospects, in your opinion, of the U.S. military being ready to act whenever the president gives that order? Is the military ready right now, for example, or will it take a few more days?

SEC. PERRY: Just on Wednesday afternoon I was on the Eisenhower aircraft carrier where we have more than 2,000 troops, not counting the sailors onboard that ship. On the Mt. Whitney, our command-and-control ship, I talked with the troops, talked to the commanders. We are ready.

MR. BLITZER: When you say the United States is ready -- so they're -- presumably after this last-ditch effort, if it fails, the president could give the order at any second?

SEC. PERRY: The president could give the order any time he cares at this time.

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MR. BLITZER: As far as you know -- I mean, and you would know obviously -- the president has not yet given the green light to the Defense Department, the chain of command, to you, to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs to move when he -- when the military deems it's appropriate?

SEC. PERRY: He has ordered to get in a full readiness to act, and we're getting in a full readiness to act.

MR. BLITZER: We've been reporting that there's some division between General Cedras, Colonel Francois and Brigadier General Biamby -- the three main leaders, the coup leaders in Haiti. Is that what your intelligence is reporting to you, too?

SEC. PERRY: I've heard those reports. I wouldn't count too much on it.

MR. BLITZER: So you think there's -- all of them are standing united or there are some cracks?

SEC. PERRY: I think there are some cracks there, but whether those cracks will lead to positive, useful action is too hard for me to speculate.

MR. BLITZER: And these reports that Colonel Francois' wife and children have already left for the Dominican Republic -- I assume you've heard those.

SEC. PERRY: We've heard those reports, yes.

MR. BLITZER: And what about Mrs. Cedras. We've been told she hasn't been seen for the past 24 hours. Have you heard anything about her whereabouts?

SEC. PERRY: Can't comment on her whereabouts.

MR. BLITZER: But do you know where her whereabouts are?

SEC. PERRY: Yes, I do.

MR. BLITZER: Is she in Haiti?

SEC. PERRY: Can't comment.

MR. BLITZER: Well, you could tell you if she's not in Haiti, right? Because that would compromise your sources? Is that the concern?

SEC. PERRY: Mmm-hmm. I'd rather not discuss that.

MR. BLITZER: All right. But Biamby -- he is the one who is seen as the real hard-liner in this triumvirate, is that correct?

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SEC. PERRY: That's the conventional wisdom. We see plenty of resistance from Cedras as well as Biamby, so it's hard to tell from our vantage point who is influencing whom on this hard position they're taking.

MR. BLITZER: What about these reports that the former prime minister of Jamaica, Edward Seaga, was involved in some sort of diplomatic initiative to try to bring this thing to a peaceful resolution?

SEC. PERRY: He has had discussions with them. I wouldn't call them diplomatic negotiations, but he has had discussions with them.

MR. BLITZER: And the U.S. ambassador in Port-au-Prince, William Swing, he is authorized by the president to meet with Cedras if, in fact, the terms of that meeting will result in the withdrawal or the departure of Cedras?

SEC. PERRY: Of course.

MR. BLITZER: But he has not been in touch with him yet, as of this moment?

SEC. PERRY: I'm not free to comment on the discussions he may be having right now.

MR. BLITZER: So Ambassador Swing is meeting with --

SEC. PERRY: Can't comment.

MR. BLITZER: -- intermediaries?

SEC. PERRY: Can't comment on those.

MR. BLITZER: But he's the main point man for this.

SEC. PERRY: He is our -- of course, our ambassador, our representative, primary representative. Anything that happens will go through him.

MR. BLITZER: Give us your bottom-line assessment right now. Will the U.S. have to use force to get involved in Haiti, or will this be resolved peacefully?

SEC. PERRY: We are prepared to use force. We're prepared to use force very soon. We hope we don't have to. And that's the most I can say about it, Wolf. Thank you.

MR. BLITZER: Okay, Defense Secretary William Perry, thank you so much for joining us.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you.

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